



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Council applauds approval of funding for pilot project to construct homes in the Former Bennett Freeze Area



Photo: Members from the Tonalea Community Development Committee, Tonalea Chapter, and Council Delegate Tuchoney Slim, Jr. attended a signing ceremony in which President Begaye signed resolution CJA-05-17 into law on Feb. 9, 2017 at Twin Arrows Navajo Casino Resort.

LEUPP, Ariz. – On Thursday afternoon, Navajo Nation Council members applauded the approval of approximately \$255,000 from the Unreserved, Undesignated Fund Balance to carry out a pilot project that would construct 10 homes in the Former Bennett Freeze Area.

On Feb. 9, President Russell Begaye signed Council resolution CJA-05-17 into law at a signing ceremony at Twin Arrows Navajo Casino Resort, which was approved by Council in Jan. 25 during the Winter Council Session.

Council Delegate Tuchoney Slim, Jr. (Bodaway/Gap, Coppermine, K'ai'biit'ó, LeChee, Tonalea/Red Lake), sponsor of the bill, said the initiative was very important for the community of Tonalea and signifies the beginning of real rehabilitation efforts within the Former Bennett Freeze Area.

"This project gives strength and hope back to the Navajo people to begin their own initiatives and make them believe that they don't have to rely on the government to do this for them. This is what empowering our people looks like, to make significant changes within their communities through hard work and advocacy," said Delegate Slim.

Delegate Slim added that the project would not have been possible without the strong leadership and advocacy of the Tonalea Community Development Committee and Tonalea Chapter, who were also present at the signing ceremony.

Council Delegate Walter Phelps (Cameron, Coalmine Canyon, Leupp, Tolani Lake, Tsidi To'ii), chair of the Navajo-Hopi Land Commission, said the pilot project was a well thought out initiative that could not have been achieved without the cooperation of the community and the Navajo Division of Community Development.

"We commend the Tonalea community and NDCD for their diligence in coming forward with a comprehensive proposal, which was supported by Council. This demonstrates that our leaders are willing to embrace solutions that are well thought out and planned by our Navajo communities," said Delegate Phelps.

Delegate Phelps added that what "sold" the initiative to Council is that the community demonstrated strong matching funds, which is a true example of self-determination and self-governance at the chapter level.

Cindy S. Covey, TCDC chair, strongly advocated for the pilot project since its inception and expressed gratitude for Council's support of the initiative.

"Thank you to the 23rd NNC for your support of this housing project. Today, President Begaye signed it into law and we can begin constructing homes for families in most need," said Covey. "I want to thank the Council members who supported us and gave our area a voice, most especially Delegate Slim for always advocating for us at the central government level."

In 1966, commissioner of the Bureau of Indian Affairs Robert Bennett ceased development of approximately 1.6 million acres of land that was in dispute by the Navajo Nation and Hopi Tribe, which prohibited Navajo families from making any improvements to their homes or to construct new homes in the area for nearly 50 years.

Congress passed the Navajo-Hopi Settlement Act and in 2009, and former U.S. President Barack Obama officially lifted the freeze on development in the area, allowing for residents to begin constructing and rehabilitating homes and facilities.

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